



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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November 17, 2009

The Honorable Robert A. O'Leary, Senate Chair
Joint Committee on Education
State House, Room 511B
Boston, Massachusetts 02133

The Honorable Martha M. Walz, House Chair
Joint Committee on Education
State House, Room 473G
Boston, Massachusetts 02133

Dear Chairman O'Leary, Chairwoman Walz, and Members of the Education Committee:

As a member of the law enforcement community, as a father, and as a coach, I strongly support An Act Relative to the Prevention of Bullying. That support stems not just from my professional duty to deter crime – it comes from my fundamental belief that every one of our children deserves an educational and scholastic environment free from fear and intimidation.

As adults in business and government, each of us is protected by law from discrimination, harassment, violence, and other behavior constituting a hostile work environment. The law recognizes that a person can't work effectively in any field if he or she is subject to abuse, taunting, or property damage.

If we as adults afford these protections to other adults, then how can we deny them to children? If we as adults recognize that harassment and coercion prevent us from doing our jobs, then how can we expect children to learn and develop amid the same abuse? It's an issue of equity, an issue of education, and an issue of child welfare. For these reasons alone, I urge you to support this legislation.

There is, however, another factor in my support for this bill and other measures to minimize bullying and harassment of young people. Several years ago, the National Threat Assessment Center of the US Secret Service undertook a study of fatal school



shootings by young students across the country. Their goal was to see what led to those shootings and how to prevent them in the future.

In its 2002 final report, the National Threat Assessment Center included among its key findings that as many as three-quarters of the young gunmen in those school shootings felt bullied or persecuted prior to the incident.

“The prevalence of bullying in this and other recent studies should strongly support ongoing efforts to reduce bullying in American schools,” the NTAC wrote in its *Safe School Initiative Final Report*¹. “Educators can play an important role in ensuring that students are not bullied in schools and that schools not only do not permit bullying but also empower other students to let adults in the school know if students are being bullied.”

An Act Relative to the Prevention of Bullying doesn’t just address the bullying we as adults might recall from the schoolyard or hallway. It recognizes the role that technology now plays in every aspect of a young person’s life – including bullying and harassment. The growing use of cell phones, text messaging, social network sites, and other technology has made communication much easier for all of us, but it’s also made devastating emotional harm as simple as pushing a button. Society and technology are changing, and our laws have to keep up with those changes.

To my knowledge, H.483 is the most common-sense and comprehensive anti-bullying legislation yet proposed. It will provide a legal framework for individual district policies, mandate enforcement of those policies, and address the dangerous potential of bullying and cyber-bullying proactively instead of reactively.

Because I share your support and concern for the children of our state’s schools, I urge you to consider this act.

Sincerely,

Daniel F. Conley
Suffolk County District Attorney

¹ http://www.secretservice.gov/ntac/ssi_final_report.pdf, p. 36